



Buildable Lands

Growth Management Services

Do we have enough residential, commercial, and industrial land for future growth?



Description

The Buildable Lands Program is required in six Western Washington counties (Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston), and the 97 cities and towns within their boundaries. It is optional for others. These local governments are comparing anticipated growth with actual development to answer two basic questions: (1) Do local governments have enough suitable land to accommodate expected growth for 20 years? and (2) Are urban densities being achieved in urban growth areas?

Background

The program is based on RCW 36.70A.215. This statute is part of a larger set of amendments that was adopted by the Legislature and signed by the Governor in May 1997. The amendments added the Buildable Lands Program to the Growth Management Act (GMA).

Participating jurisdictions are required to gather data annually and evaluate, at five-year intervals, the level and type of development occurring. They are comparing this information to the expected level and type of development, as identified in local comprehensive plans. This applies to housing, commercial, and industrial land uses in both urban and rural areas.

If gaps are identified between projected targets and actual data, local governments are to adopt and implement measures that are reasonably likely to increase consistency during the next five-year period. Techniques, other than adjusting urban growth boundaries, are to be used.



The Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) provides technical assistance to local governments on this topic. CTED has worked with a local government advisory group to coordinate the process, develop definitions, share information, and investigate ways to fund data collection needs. With assistance from the advisory group, CTED published guidelines to provide common definitions and a framework for local programs. Copies are available through Growth Management Services at (360) 725-3000.

Local governments have received about \$4.5 million in state funding for their buildable lands programs. State funding was eliminated in 2002, but the buildable lands requirements for the six counties remain.



What's Being Done

The first reports under the state's Buildable Lands Program are now available. All county reports indicate that their overall UGAs have adequate capacity to meet growth demands as indicated in their adopted comprehensive plans. However, there are a few individual cities that may not have adequate land supply for either residential and/or non-residential use.

The counties also addressed urban densities in their reports. Greater densities mean less sprawl and reduced costs of public services.

The average achieved residential dwelling units per acre in the UGAs as indicated in the counties' reports are: Clark 6, King 7.3, Pierce 4.02, and Thurston 3.59. Using a slightly different methodology, which may result in higher estimates, Kitsap reported 3.87 and Snohomish 8.89 dwelling units per acre.

Two specific examples are given in the report showing how residential development is changing. In Pierce County, residential densities have increased from under 2 to more than 4 dwelling units per acre from 1995-2000, and a trend towards even higher densities appears to be occurring as the county's GMA policies take effect. An analysis of density trends in urban King County shows a significant movement toward greater density in residential land is taking place.

Jurisdictions with a large inventory of lots created before GMA plans began to be carried out may have a lower achieved density until that inventory is replaced over time with subdivisions that meet the counties' requirements under their GMA plans.



For More Information

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What's Next

The Buildable Lands Program is a five-year evaluation program. The next key date is September 1, 2007, when counties will be completing their second report under the Buildable Lands Program. CTED will continue to coordinate information and provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions. In December 2007, CTED will report back to the Legislature on the effectiveness of the program.

Photos: City of Seattle; Jan Meston; CTED/Rita R. Robison